

Study shows most diabetics are obese and don't meet health recommendations

More than half of adult diabetics in the USA are obese and many more have higher-than-recommended blood pressure, cholesterol levels and blood sugar, all factors that raise their risk of complications and death, a government study found. So says Catherine Cowie, of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, one of the authors of a study published in the 21 January 2004 edition of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Overall, only about 7% of adults with diabetes studied had attained the recommended levels for blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol, the study of health surveys from 1999 to 2000 and 1988 to 1994 found. The surveys involved a total of about 1 700 participants. The researchers found a glimmer of hope, viz. significant improvement among diabetics in controlling cholesterol. Still, almost 52% of the diabetics in the 2000 survey had cholesterol levels at or above the recommended reading of 200, compared with 66% in the earlier survey. Disturbingly, the percentage of participants who were obese jumped from about 42% to about 55%.

Source: www.diabetesnews.com

Cell transplantation gives hope to diabetics

Hope for diabetics has been supported by the use of transplanted pancreatic cells. The treatment allows patients to be free of the insulin pump, the constant monitoring of food and drink, frightening spikes and dangerous drops of blood sugar.

Gary Kleiman, executive director for medical development at the University of Miami's Diabetes Research Institute (DRI), where he received the experimental islet cell transplant a year ago, says: 'For the first time in a long, long time, I can think about a future.' For now, Kleiman and fellow islet cell recipients still require powerful immunosuppressants to keep their bodies from rejecting the tiny cell clusters, and doctors don't know how the islets will work long-term. Insulin-free for 3 years come June, Rachel Harris, 34, is believed to be the world's longest insulin-free diabetic. 'There has been more progress in the last 4 years than the preceding 2 decades,' said Dr Camillo Ricordi, scientific director of the DRI. 'But it's not a final victory.' Rather than try to transplant the entire pancreas, Ricordi pioneered a method to isolate cells in the pancreas that produce insulin. In a 4 - 6-hour process, the pancreas is broken down by enzymes, and the islet cells are purified. They are then injected through a vein into the recipient's liver, where they assist in controlling the blood glucose concentration. Even with a new regimen of anti-rejection drugs, the transplant is experimental, Ricordi said, and not recommended for those with diabetes under control.

Two major problems are rejection and the need outranking the donor supply. Bone marrow transplants may be a solution to the immunosuppression, and trans-species transplants may provide sufficient islets. The diabetes researchers are hesitant to commit to any timeline as to when the worldwide research could translate into a diabetes cure.

NIH cancels second women's health study

For the second time in 2 years, the National Institutes of Health has halted a massive women's health

study, telling postmenopausal participants to stop taking oestrogen because it does not protect them from heart disease and may even increase the risk of stroke.

'This reinforces the previous recommendation that women should not take hormone therapy to prevent heart disease,' said Dr Barbara Alving, director of the Women's Health Initiative and acting director of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute of the NIH. If women are considering oestrogen therapy for relief of severe menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and symptoms of vulvar and vaginal wasting, she said, 'they should use it at the lowest doses, for the shortest period of time'. Although it is effective for preventing osteoporosis, NIH officials discouraged it for women unless they are at high risk and cannot take other medications.

The study followed 11 000 healthy postmenopausal women, aged 50 - 79, who had previously undergone hysterectomy. It became apparent fairly early that women taking oestrogen faced a slightly higher risk of stroke than the control group taking a placebo pill, NIH officials said, and participants were warned about the increased risk.

The NIH decided to stop the oestrogen-alone study on 2 February 2004, after the initiative's Data and Safety Monitoring Board, an independent advisory committee, reviewed the latest data.

One intriguing finding was that oestrogen alone, long suspected as a culprit in breast cancer, did not increase the risk during the time period of the study.

More detailed analysis of data from the study will be reported in the next 2 months and published in medical journals, NIH officials said.